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ABSTRACT

This study sought to: (1) identify Southeastern high school senior perceptions of the teaching profession; (2) determine whether significant differences exist between groups categorized on the basis of sex and race; and (3) identify factors which significantly discriminate between students who are considering teaching and those who are not. The study consisted of 2,478 subjects representing 10 different Southeastern states. Subjects responded to a data gathering instrument devised to ascertain high school senior perceptions of the teaching profession. Study results showed that: (1) Salary, discipline problems, and working conditions were perceived by the majority of students as discouraging factors; (2) The limited number of high school seniors considering teaching as a career made that decision at an earlier age than previously thought; and (3) The factor that best discriminates whether students will consider teaching as a career is simply whether or not other individuals have discussed this possibility with them. Study implications are discussed, and seven tables and the survey questionnaire are appended. (JMK)

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HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING AS A CAREER OPPORTUNITY

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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

In a nation of diverse interests, needs, and aspirations, there may be a few elements of commonality that are of significance to its citizenry. Education is one such element. Not only is education commonplace in practice, but it is rapidly becoming a focal point of interest in print and other media.

Teachers of tomorrow are elementary and high school students today. The condition of their current academic pursuits may well influence them to consider, or fail to consider, teaching as a career opportunity.

Teacher educators, anticipating, or at least hoping for, a trend reversal in declining teacher preparation enrollments, find little encouragement stemming from the conditions of our educational system. The decline of test scores has been a prominent feature when extolling the failures of teachers to educate our children. "Average Scholastic Aptitude Test scores of college-bound high school seniors declined 65 points from 1967 to 1982. In the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, each student is measured against the norm of a certain point in a school year, such as reading at a sixth grade, six-month level. Performances of eighth grade students dropped so far between 1971 and 1978 that test officials lowered the norm by five months."[1] For some children, though, improving academically may not be as high a priority as surviving. President Reagan recently warned that the nation's classrooms are gripped by fear and violence.[2] Perhaps he was privy to information that the mother of a 15 year-old boy who was stabbed to death in a Chicago school filed a $15,000,000 lawsuit in her son's name.[3]

Though prominently featured in our society, the negatives of education are only a portion of the picture for teacher educators to consider. The school-age population (5 to 17 year olds) is a significant element in the need for teachers. Enrollment in regular elementary and secondary schools peaked in

1971 at 51,300,000. Since that time, enrollments have decreased continuously and are expected to reach a low point in 1984 of 44,000,000. Then, enrollments are expected to increase, reaching 46,700,000 in 1990.[4]

Initial reaction to this anticipated increased need for teachers is positive. However, a brief reflection on teacher education enrollment patterns may alter that reaction. The peak year for graduates with a baccalaureate in teacher preparation was in the 1972-73 academic year. At that time, 930,272 baccalaureate degrees were awarded, of which 195,640, or 21 percent, were in education.[5] By the end of the decade, in 1979, 921,390 baccalaureate degrees were conferred with 126,006, or 13.7 percent, in education.[6] While the spiral in the number of teacher education graduates has been downward, a moderate increase is projected. These projections depict 17 percent of baccalaureate degree recipients in 1990 being in the field of education.[7]

The set of circumstances that has been presented offers an array of facts for teacher educators to consider as they anticipate future enrollment developments in their preparatory programs. And, these circumstances emphasize that recruitment of individuals for the teaching profession is essential. Information from this study should provide educators with an understanding of the backgrounds and perceptions of the students that will be their targets for recruitment.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of the study is three-fold: (1) to identify Southeastern high school senior perceptions of the teaching profession, (2) to determine whether significant differences exist between groups categorized on the basis of sex and race, and (3) to identify factors which significantly discriminate between students who are considering teaching and those who are not.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The study consisted of 2,478 subjects, representing ten different Southeastern states. Contact persons in colleges and schools of education were asked to identify schools that would be potential participants in the study. Appropriate channels were utilized, central office contact followed by contact with the principal, to determine a school's willingness to participate.

Subjects responded to a data gathering instrument devised by the authors to ascertain high school senior perceptions of the teaching profession. Organization of the instrument includes three areas of questions. One area relates to background information. Subjects respond to requests related to sex, race, future plans, and identification of persons, if any, with whom they had discussed teaching as a future job opportunity. A second area provides respondents, who are considering teaching as a career goal, the opportunity to provide additional information. These subjects identify the age at which they became interested in teaching and the grade level and subject areas in which they would like to teach. The third area elicits responses to determine perceptions of the teaching profession. In this area, there are 22 questions that require subjects to select a yes or no response. One question is multiple-choice.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Responses of students were analyzed to determine: frequency statistics for background information and perceptions, differences between groups categorized on the basis of sex and race, and factors which discriminate between students considering teaching and those who are not. Frequency tabulations, one-way analyses of variance, and the Wilks Lambda discriminant analysis statistic were utilized in this effort.

Discriminant analysis indicates that the instrument predicted with 81.63 percent accuracy whether or not students were considering teaching as a future

career opportunity. Only 12 percent of the students actually responded that they would consider teaching.

Salary was perceived by the majority of students (82.9 percent) as a discouraging factor. Discipline problems and working conditions were also perceived as discouraging. However, most of the students viewed teaching as a "good profession to enter," especially for women. Black and female students perceived many factors in teaching in a significantly more positive manner when comparisons were made between groups categorized on the basis of sex and race.

The limited number of high school seniors who are considering teaching as potential employment made that decision at an earlier age than teacher educators may have thought. Findings of the study indicated that 40 percent of students interested in teaching made that decision prior to age 15. Additionally, 40 percent became interested at age 15 or 16. Only 20 percent made this decision as a 17 or 18 year old.

The major finding of the study was that the factor that best discriminates whether students will consider teaching is simply whether or not other individuals have discussed this possibility with them. Revealing to educators is that a majority of students (74.3 percent) had never had anyone talk with them about the teaching profession. Parents and teachers were the individuals that more than likely discussed teaching with the remaining minority. Only one percent of the students reported that the school counselor had presented the teaching profession as a possibility for consideration to them.

The frequency percentages for the items are indicated on Tables 1 and 2. Results of the analyses of variance statistics comparing groups categorized on the basis of sex and race are found on Tables 3 and 4. Summary results for the discriminant analysis are presented on Tables 5, 6, and 7.

IMPLICATIONS

Findings of the study support the fact that potential teacher aspirants are few in number. Rather than this message sounding an alarm, it may be considered a challenge; the challenge being for schools and colleges of education to organize and implement programs for recruitment. However, the target population should be more inclusive than high school seniors. Career awareness is an important issue throughout the various school grade levels. If actively sought, teacher educators should be able to secure career exploration opportunities in schools as far down as the middle grades and extending upward. As noted in the study, interest in teaching prior to 15 years old occurs in 20 percent of the students. Therefore, recruitment efforts should be devised to include levels other than the senior year in high school.

Contact with students is an essential ingredient in the recruitment format. However, there are other significant individuals with whom teacher educators should establish contact. Counselors, principals, and teachers have frequent, if not daily, associations with students. Encouragement of these individuals, by teacher educators, to offer students appropriate information on the teaching profession could generate positive results.

The study implies that students are discouraged by negative school environments. In an indirect manner, teacher preparation programs can positively affect these conditions. Teacher educators, as teachers of undergraduate and graduate students, serve as role models. Yes, the information that is shared, along with course requirements that are made, are important in the development of preservice and inservice teachers. Perhaps, though, one of the most significant aspects is the role model. Are we only telling our students about teaching, or, are they seeing the latest and best models demonstrated in our classroom techniques?

The considerations of current educational conditions and who should prepare teachers is a popular topic. When questioned about the contributing factors of the publicized sad state of American education, B.F. Skinner very specifically responded. "Blame it on those in control in schools of education and teachers' colleges. They are the ones who have been teaching teachers and administrators for many years."[9] In light of his specification of contributing causes to the demise of our educational products, Skinner's response to the possibility of eliminating schools of education is interesting: "That would be a great mistake. Teachers need to be taught how to teach."[9]

The advanced technical and numerous other aspects of American society clearly indicate that there are positive derivatives of the nation's educational system. For these kinds of contributions to continue, an available, adequate supply of teachers is imperative. The immediate outlook serves clear notice: ". . . the National Center for Education Statistics estimates that by 1985 the nation will need 46,000 more teachers than will be available."[10] This study is intended to identify descriptive data on potential education majors and their perceptions of teaching as a career opportunity. Hopefully, the data will be beneficial to those responsible for developing and/or coordinating recruitment of teacher education students in an effort to provide an adequate supply of available teachers.

TABLE 1

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: FREQUENCY STATISTICS

ITEMS	RESPONSES	% OF TOTAL	% OF YES
SEX	MALE		48.1
	FEMALE		51.9
RACE	BLACK		15.9
	WHITE		83.8
	OTHER		.3
AFTER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION I PLAN TO:	BEGIN FULL TIME WORK		21.4
	ENTER COLLEGE		62.4
	ENTER VOCATIONAL SCHOOL		6.1
	JOIN ARMED SERVICES		4.6
	OTHER		5.5
HAS ANYONE EVER TALKED TO YOU ABOUT BECOMING A TEACHER?	YES		25.7
	NO		74.3
IF SOMEONE HAS TALKED WITH YOU ABOUT BECOMING A TEACHER, PLEASE INDICATE THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PERSON(S).	PARENT	6.4	24.5
	TEACHER	5.6	21.5
	COUNSELOR	1.0	3.9
	FRIENDS	2.8	10.7
	OTHERS	1.6	6.1
	COMBINATIONS	8.7	33.3
ARE YOU CONSIDERING TEACHING AS A FUTURE JOB OPPORTUNITY?	YES		1
	NO		8
IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING TEACHING, AT WHAT AGE DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN TEACHING?	PRIOR TO AGE 15		40
	AGE 15 - 16		40
	AGE 17 - 18		20
IF YOU ARE CONSIDERING TEACHING, WHAT GRADE DO YOU THINK YOU WOULD LIKE TO TEACH?	PRIMARY (K-3)		45
	MIDDLE (4-8)		20
	SECONDARY (9-12)		35

TABLE 2

PERCEPTIONS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION
AS A FUTURE CAREER OPPORTUNITY:
FREQUENCY STATISTICS

ITEMS	RESPONSES AND PERCENTAGES	
WOULD THESE INDIVIDUALS ENCOURAGE YOU?		
PARENTS	YES - 66.7	NO - 33.3
TEACHERS	YES - 70.3	NO - 29.7
PRINCIPAL	YES - 56.7	NO - 43.3
COUNSELOR	YES - 68.2	NO - 31.8
FRIENDS	YES - 38.0	NO - 62.0
WOULD THESE FACTORS ENCOURAGE YOU?		
SALARY	YES - 23.7	NO - 76.3
FRINGE BENEFITS	YES - 54.7	NO - 45.3
WORKING CONDITIONS	YES - 52.2	NO - 47.8
CONTRIBUTIONS TO HUMANITY	YES - 68.9	NO - 31.2
SOCIETAL STATUS	YES - 35.3	NO - 64.7
JOB SECURITY	YES - 23.7	NO - 76.3
JOB AVAILABILITY	YES - 42.7	NO - 57.3
OTHERS	YES - 6.3	NO - 93.7
WOULD THESE FACTORS DISCOURAGE YOU?		
SALARY	YES - 82.9	NO - 17.1
WORKING CONDITIONS	YES - 54.6	NO - 45.4
DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS	YES - 75.8	NO - 24.2
SOCIETAL STATUS	YES - 39.4	NO - 60.6
JOB AVAILABILITY	YES - 60.3	NO - 39.7
JOB SECURITY	YES - 50.1	NO - 49.9
OTHERS	YES - 9.4	NO - 90.6

TABLE 2 -- Continued

ITEMS	RESPONSES AND PERCENTAGES	
TEACHERS ENJOY THEIR WORK		
MOST OF THE TIME	YES - 52	NO - 48
TEACHING IS A GOOD PROFESSION:		
FOR MEN TO ENTER	YES - 62.3	NO - 37.7
FOR WOMEN TO ENTER	YES - 82.1	NO - 17.9

TABLE 3

VARIABLES SHOWING SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS CATEGORIZED ON THE BASIS OF SEX

VARIABLES	F. PROB.	*DIRECTION OF SIGNIFICANCE
FUTURE PLANS	.092	MALES WERE MORE LIKELY TO RESPOND THAT THEY WOULD ENTER VOC. SCHOOL OR JOIN ARMED SERVICES
SOMEONE TALKED	.0000	F>M
WHO TALKED	.0000	F>M
CONSIDERING TEACHING	.0000	F>M
PARENTS WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0004	F>M
TEACHERS WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0000	F>M
COUNSELOR WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0007	F>M
FRIENDS WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0000	F>M
FRINGE BENEFITS WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0024	F>M
SOCIETAL STATUS WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0338	F>M
JOB AVAILABILITY WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0402	M>F
OTHER FACTORS WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0014	M>F
DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS WOULD DISCOURAGE	.0284	F>M
OTHER FACTORS WOULD DISCOURAGE	.0049	M>F
GOOD PROFESSION FOR MEN	.0000	F>M

* THE SYMBOL ">" (GREATER THAN) IS UTILIZED TO SEPARATE GROUPS, WITH THOSE RESPONDING "YES" A SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER NUMBER OF TIMES ON THE LEFT.

F = FEMALE
M = MALE

TABLE 4

VARIABLES SHOWING SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN GROUPS CATEGORIZED ON THE
BASIS OF RACE

VARIABLE	F PROB.	* DIRECTION OF SIGNIFICANCE
SOMEONE TALKED	.0500	B>W
PARENTS WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0229	B>W
PRINCIPAL WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0012	B>W
SALARY WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0000	B>W
CONTRIBUTION TO HUMANITY WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0000	W>B
SOCIAL STATUS WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0000	B>W
JOB SECURITY WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0000	B>W
JOB AVAILABILITY WOULD ENCOURAGE	.0000	B>W
SALARY WOULD DISCOURAGE	.0000	W>B
JOB AVAILABILITY WOULD DISCOURAGE	.0000	W>B
JOB SECURITY WOULD DISCOURAGE	.0133	W>B

* THE SYMBOL ">" (GREATER THAN) IS UTILIZED TO SEPARATE GROUPS, WITH THOSE RESPONDING "YES" A SIGNIFICANTLY GREATER NUMBER OF TIMES ON THE LEFT.

B = BLACK
W = WHITE

TABLE 5

VARIABLES WHICH INDEPENDENTLY DISCRIMINATE BETWEEN THOSE WHO ARE CONSIDERING TEACHING AND THOSE WHO ARE NOT

SIGNIFICANT VARIABLES	LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE
BACKGROUND INFORMATION	
SEX	.0000
SOMEONE TALKED	0
WHO TALKED	0
PERCEPTIONS OF POSSIBLE ENCOURAGEMENT FROM INDIVIDUALS	
PARENTS	.0000
PRINCIPAL	.0375
FRIENDS	.0000
PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS THAT ENCOURAGE OR DISCOURAGE	
FRINGE BENEFITS	.0102
WORKING CONDITIONS	.0128
CONTRIBUTION TO HUMANITY	.0003
JOB SECURITY	.0002
SOCIETAL STATUS	.0306
OTHERS	.0154
PERCEPTIONS OF HOW MUCH TEACHERS ENJOY THEIR WORK	.0000
PERCEPTIONS OF WHETHER TEACHING IS A GOOD PROFESSION:	
FOR WOMEN TO ENTER	.0000
FOR MEN TO ENTER	.0000

TABLE 6

DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS
SUMMARY TABLE

STEP	ACTION ENTERED	REMOVED	VARS IN	WILKS LAMBDA	SIG.
1.	WHO TALKED		1	.848010	0
2	x22 (GOOD FOR WOMEN)		2	.844518	.0000
3.	x5 (FRIENDS WOULD ENCOURAGE)		3	.837777	.0000
4	SOMEONE TALKED		4	.831685	.0000
5	x6 (TEACHERS ENJOY WORK)		5		
6	RACE		6	.826249	.0000
7	x12 (JOB SECURITY WOULD ENCOURAGE)		7	.823669	.0000
8	x11 (SOCIETAL STATUS WOULD ENCOURAGE)		8	.821384	.0000
9	x1 (PARENTS WOULD ENCOURAGE)		9	.819327	.0000
10	x4 (COUNSELOR WOULD ENCOURAGE)		10	.817867	.0000
11	x10 (CONTRIBUTION TO HUMANITY WOULD ENCOURAGE)		11	.816320	.0000
12	SEX		12	.815069	.0000
13	x18 (SOCIETAL STATUS WOULD DISCOURAGE)		13	.814009	.0000
14	x14 (OTHERS WOULD ENCOURAGE)		14	.813251	.0000
15	x23 (GOOD FOR MEN)		15	.812575	.0000
16	x2 (TEACHERS WOULD ENCOURAGE)		16	.811853	.0000
17	x3 (PRINCIPAL WOULD ENCOURAGE)		17	.811237	.0000
18	x19 (JOB AVAILABILITY WOULD DISCOURAGE)		18	.810679	.0000
19	x13 (JOB AVAILABILITY WOULD ENCOURAGE)		19	,809436	.0000

TABLE 7

DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS
CLASSIFICATION RESULTS

GROUPS	PREDICTED GROUP MEMBERSHIP TEACHING	NON-TEACHING
PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS	66.2%	33.8%
NON-PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS	16.3%	83.7%

PERCENT OF GROUPED CASES CORRECTLY CLASSIFIED - 81.63

The Teaching Profession:
Perceptions of High School Seniors

The following items are designed to obtain your perceptions of the teaching profession as a future job opportunity. Please circle the appropriate answers.

1. If you showed an interest in becoming a teacher, do you feel that the individuals listed below would encourage you?

(a)	parents	yes	no
(b)	teachers	yes	no
(c)	principal	yes	no
(d)	school counselor	yes	no
(e)	friends	yes	no

2. How much do you think teachers enjoy their work? (circle one)

all of the time
most of the time
some of the time
very little
not at all

3. Do you think the following aspects of teaching would encourage students to consider the teaching profession as a future job opportunity?

(a)	salary	yes	no
(b)	fringe benefits (retirement, vacation)	yes	no
(c)	working conditions	yes	no
(d)	contribution to humanity	yes	no
(e)	societal status	yes	no
(f)	job security	yes	no
(g)	job availability	yes	no
(h)	others _____ (please specify)	yes	no

4. Do you think the following aspects of teaching would discourage students from considering the teaching profession as a future job opportunity?

(a)	salary	yes	no
(b)	working conditions	yes	no
(c)	discipline problems	yes	no
(d)	social status	yes	no
(e)	job availability	yes	no
(f)	job security	yes	no
(g)	others _____ (please specify)	yes	no

5. Do you think teaching is a good profession

(a)	for women to enter?	yes	no
(b)	for men to enter?	yes	no

Please respond to the background information on the attached page.

Background Information

Circle the appropriate response for each item.

1. Sex: (a) Male (b) Female

2. Race: (a) Black (b) White (c) Other_____(Specify)

3. After High School graduation I plan to:

   (a) begin full time work

   (b) enter college

   (c) enter vocational school

   (d) join the armed services

   (e) other_____(Specify)

4. Has anyone ever talked to you about becoming a teacher? Yes No

   If you circled yes, please indicate the relationship of the person(s) to you by circling the appropriate roles.

   parent friend

   teacher others_____
   (Please specify)

   school counselor

5. Are you considering teaching as a future job opportunity? Yes No

   If you circled yes, please respond to the information requested below:

---

a. At what age did you become interested in teaching?_____

b. What grade do you think you would like to teach?_____

   What subjects?_____

c. If you would like additional information concerning teaching and teacher preparation, please give us your name and address:

   Name _____

   Street Address _____

   City, State, Zip _____

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